1: Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
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VI

ARTS OF LIFE

The Village

361 THE typical Orokaiva village would comprise hardly more than a dozen houses, and many settlements are much smaller. In former times, if native accounts are to be trusted, villages were more extensive through need of mutual protection against the raider; and a resident magistrate patrolling the river Gira in 1901 speaks of a village 200 yards long by two chains broad, which contained seventy-one houses and was 'barricaded in with a look-out and fighting platforms on [712] the stockade'.[1] But nowadays pacification has brought about a tendency to scatter in small isolated groups.

The bush settlement is closely surrounded by walls of forest, so that the view is somewhat depressingly circumscribed; among the Salt-Water People the village stands virtually on the margin of the beach; among the River People it is invariably placed on the river bank. In most cases and in so far as the floods allow, it is well situated on dry ground. The modern village, by Government edict, is 364 kept almost scrupulously clean, and when the visit of a patrol is imminent one may see old folk and children engaged in the meticulous removal of weeds. At all times, however, it is fairly well swept by the women. Refuse of coco-nut husks and the like is thrown away beyond the edge [514] of the clearing, and for sanitary arrangements there is the privacy of the circumambient bush. Much of the credit for the cleanliness of the village is due to the tireless scavenging of pigs.

The House

342 In most instances the houses are set in two regular rows, facing one another. The space between, sporadically planted with coco-nut palms, is the scene of dances, plays, and inter-

[1] A. L. Walker, *Annual Report*, 1900-1, p. 33.

[p. 68]

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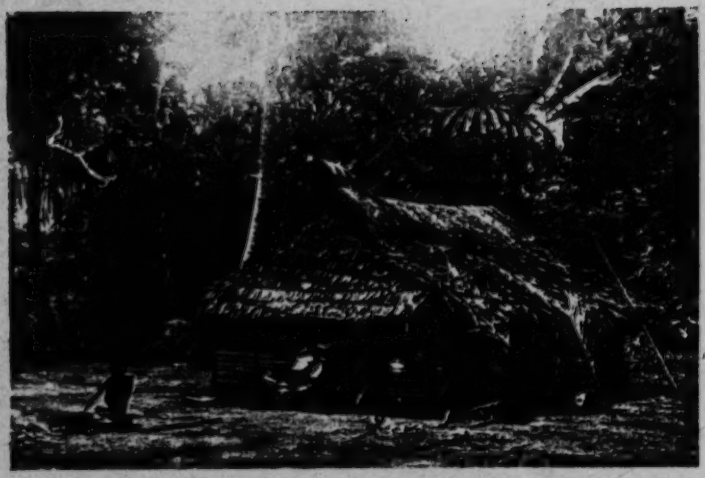

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(*a*) Original type of Orokaiva house

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(*b*) Yam-house, Dwelling, and combined Yam-house and Sitting-place

PLATE XIV [facing p. 68]

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342 [177] village scuffles. The old-fashioned house has been for the most part replaced by the 'European' model. This does not always mean any great change, save that the new house is loftier and airier and frequently possesses an annexe or 'kitchen' which seems as a rule to serve any purpose but a culinary one. But the general improvement is undeniable. The true native dwellings of the Orokaiva were so poor that W. E. Armit, an early resident magistrate, described them as 'miserable little things, small ramshackle erections', and referred to an Opi village as 'a collection of squalid hovels'.[1]

The original Orokaiva house (*mande*) is oblong and very low. The floor proper (*gaga*) is raised on piles, but the space beneath is roughly walled in so as to form a closed compartment called *su*. Above the floor proper there is often an interior platform or shelf (*habari*) forming, as it were, a third story under the slope of the roof, but as a rule only along one side of the house, so that it resembles a sleeping-berth more than anything else. The ridged roof is so low that a man cannot stand upright on the *gaga*. The essential part of the whole structure is the *gaga*. This is built first on strong piles of its own, and then the roof supports and the walls are built around it independently save for bindings of split cane. In some cases, indeed, the walls are wholly separate from the *gaga*, which is enclosed as it were in a box. The piles and main posts are of various hard-woods, but the other timbers are soft and far from durable. The walls of the true native house consist of rails or logs laid horizontally, but in the more modern style their place has been taken by branch-midribs of the sago palm set vertically. The thatching is of sago leaf.

The interior of the house is dark, warm, and smoky. It contains a variety of pots, wood bowls, string bags, pignets, water calabashes, and other domestic paraphernalia; [251] maybe several bags of *Puga* nuts, blocks of sago, and drying *Tauga* nuts attached to poles and suspended under the ridge-[252] pole. Cooking is done out of doors in fine weather, and at other times underneath the house in the *su*. In cold weather

[1] *Annual Report*, 1899–1900, pp. 90; 87.

In cold weather the fire burns all night through, and in the ascending heat and smoke the family sleeps warm and grimily, the householder on the *babari*,[1] his wife and family on the *gaga*,[2] and his pigs and dogs in the *su*.[3] Under the constant influence of the rising smoke the interior of the house acquires a curious metallic polish, and the poles of the roof become coated with a black lichen of soot. Conflagrations are rarer than one would expect under the circumstances.

Miscellaneous Buildings

The men's house is called *oro*. If built in connexion with a ceremony and intended as a male club-house or what might be termed a concert-hall, the men's house is called specifically *arijo*; it will occupy a central position and be of more pretentious size—say 40 feet long; and it may boast some decoration in the form of frayed sago leaf hanging in fringes from the eaves. These *arijo* houses are not seen very frequently. A peculiar feature of one or two of them is an outward-sloping wall, which gives the edifice the contours of an oblong haystack. The ordinary *oro*, which is simply the regular domicile of the young bachelors, may be small and without any distinctive feature.

A mere roofless platform is sometimes to be seen as a place of social intercourse. Among the southern tribes it is more usually combined with the picturesque little *baraa* or yam-house, in which a small attic compartment above is the repository for the sprouting yams.

The Orokaiva, a true *improvisatore*, will find the materials for a house at a moment's notice. Overtaken by bad weather or benighted on the road, he will turn aside, fell a few saplings, make a selection of palm or wild banana leaves for thatch, and construct a lean-to or penthouse with a raised floor and a tolerably water-tight roof. A common trick of extempore construction is to use a slanting strut so tied to the upright that its upper end projects and thus forms a rest for a piece of cross-timber. See Plate XIV*b*.

Of tree houses (*savai*), which were formerly common enough, I have seen no evidence in the whole Division,

[1] [i.e. an interior platform or shelf above the floor—Analyst]
[2] [i.e. the floor proper—Analyst]
[3] [i.e. walled in space beneath the floor.—Analyst]

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except for certain large trees which are said to have supported them in less reposeful days. They were not fighting-tops so much as places of refuge in which a surprised village might keep its assailants at bay until the blasts of the wooden trumpets brought help from surrounding allies. They were built in the branches of large trees in or near the village (sometimes in several adjacent trees connected with cane gangways), and were furnished with cane-ladders or 'legs' (*sawai-tei*). The stockade provided another means of defence, though this too has disappeared with the coming of the King's peace.

A method of dwelling which I believe to be unique in Papua is described by Beaver, and, though he had not the witness of his eyes, it appears that he was dealing with a reliable informant.

'I had many times heard', he writes, 'that the Dogi people used to live on rafts moored round the lake, and had been inclined to look upon the story as rather of the traveller's tale variety, but I found that it was actually the case. They used to live on the shore, but, owing to successive raids by the Iawabuie and Binandele, the Dogi built huge rafts —the water was too deep to sink piles—and constructed their houses on these refuges. Ninei, the present village constable, a man about 40, was born on one of these floating arks, and he tells me the people were living on them when first visited by Mr. M. M. Clark.'[1]

It was probably about 1895 that Mr. Clark was prospecting in this neighbourhood, and the lake referred to is presumably Lake Koena. I did not visit the locality myself and can only verify the legend of the eel and the flood which Beaver tells in connexion with the origin of the lake. I found this legend, however, coupled with the adventures of two surviving children rescued by a woman named Bobokoia, who was of great size, like an island, with sago palms growing on her back. The children lived on this floating island or woman until finally they settled on shore again. It seems hardly credible that the story of the raft-dwellings should have turned into that of Bobokoia within the time, though the likeness seems suspicious. It is not improbable that the raft dwellings were of no more than a temporary nature, and that the legend dates back much earlier.

[1] *Annual Report*, 1914-15, p. 14.

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(*a*) A Bride with part of the Bride-price

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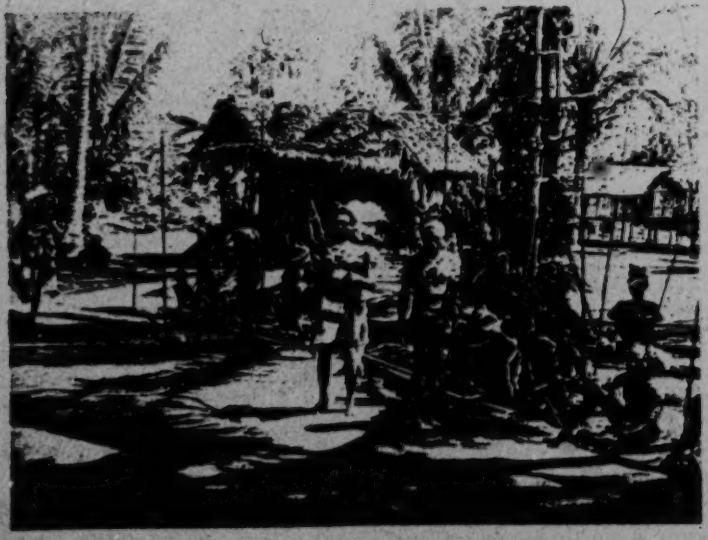

(*b*) Preparations for handing over the Bride-price

PLATE XXII [facing p. 140]